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President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 43

The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/55/175, A/55/389, A/55/465)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/55/174)

Draft resolutions (A/55/L.33/Rev.1, A/55/L.42)

The President: I call on the representative of Nicaragua to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.42.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to introduce to the General Assembly, on behalf of all the sponsoring delegations from various parts of the world and on behalf of my own delegation, draft resolution A/55/L.42, entitled "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development".

This draft resolution is based in large measure on document A/55/465, which contains the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Central America. Accordingly, we have incorporated important elements of the report that have provided us with important inputs in drafting the resolution. We have also considered and mentioned in the draft resolution recent political events in our region, which clearly show the path on which we have embarked in our Central American countries.

It can be seen that the preambular part of the draft resolution contains a number of points on the main issues, covering decisive aspects for continuing the efforts to expand and strengthen peace and development in the Central America region.

In this regard, the following points are emphasized in the preambular paragraphs: earlier General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on this item; the timely and valuable attention Central America has received in the framework of the United Nations; and the important assistance and cooperation our region has received from the international community, bilaterally and multilaterally — and in this regard, we emphasize the importance we attach to the meetings of the regional Consultative Group for the transformation and modernization of Central America.

Also highlighted is the satisfaction of proving that the peace agreements achieved in countries like Guatemala and El Salvador have generated real peace processes, thus opening new opportunities for greater development in the area; similarly, the effective participation and the presence of the United Nations in these processes through the various working committees that have been organized to this end; and the most recent elections held in the area, which show

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us that the culture of democracy has a place in the region and that we can strengthen it.

The preambular part also highlights the fact that our region continues to be highly vulnerable to the forces of nature and the link between the devastating impact of natural disasters and the efforts made by our peoples and Governments to achieve better living conditions; and governmental efforts made by our countries to prepare us to deal with the effects of natural disasters in a more organized and effective way when they strike us.

The operative part of the draft resolution consists of 17 paragraphs, in which, most notably, it expresses appreciation for the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Central America; recognizes the need to continue focusing on the region within the context of the objectives and principles of the Stockholm Declaration; and recognizes the importance of continuing to develop the work of the regional Consultative Group for the transformation and modernization of Central America, particularly through its forthcoming meeting in Madrid in January 2001.

The operative part of the draft resolution also commends the efforts made by the Central American Governments to reduce risk and to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters; welcomes the achievements and progress made in implementing the El Salvador peace agreements and the Guatemala peace agreements, and calls on the international community, the Secretary-General and the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to continue supporting and verifying the process in Guatemala.

Several aspects related to regional integration are highlighted, particularly the importance of the Central American Integration System as the body set up to coordinate and harmonize integration efforts. In this regard, the draft resolution highlights the Trinational Declaration signed between El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua and open for participation to the rest of the Central American countries. Its objective is to progress along the path towards greater regional integration.

The draft resolution also reaffirms the need to continue improving electoral processes in the area and notes with satisfaction the resolve of the countries of the region to resolve their disputes by peaceful means.

Finally, in the operative part of the draft resolution, we wish to highlight the appeal to the international community to continue providing assistance and cooperation to the region, even though important progress has already been made in the areas of strengthening democracy and peace, with a view to finally overcoming the deeply rooted causes of past armed conflicts and to avoid future recurrences.

In conclusion I wish to say, on behalf of the sponsors of the draft resolution, that we are confident that our draft resolution will have no difficulty being adopted by consensus by the General Assembly.

The President: I call now on the representative of Mexico to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.33/Rev.1.

Mr. Albin (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour, on behalf of the other sponsors, to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.33/Rev.1, entitled "United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala". In addition to the sponsors listed in that document, the following delegations have joined in sponsoring the draft resolution: Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guyana, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

On 29 December 1996, 36 years of internal conflict in Guatemala came to an end with the signing of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace, which was the culmination of a six-year negotiating process under United Nations auspices and which implemented a range of earlier agreements addressing political, military, legislative, social, economic, agrarian, ethnic and cultural matters. This all constituted a broad national agenda for peace.

Since then, by the decision of the parties, the United Nations has played a major role in verifying the implementation of the agreements. That is essentially the function of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA). MINUGUA's presence in Guatemala has been very positive. The parties, as well as Guatemalan society at large, have recognized that, through the Mission, the United Nations has lent a sense of certainty and trust to the implementation of the peace agreements. There is thus a solid consensus in Guatemala concerning the need for MINUGUA to remain there until 2003.

As members know, the draft resolution refers to previous decisions of the General Assembly, to reports of the Secretary-General and of the Mission, to achievements and challenges in the peace process, and to the importance that the international community attaches to the fulfilment of pending commitments in the framework of the agreed rescheduling. The draft resolution refers to the importance the parties attach to a continuing MINUGUA presence in Guatemala until 2003 and, in that context, stresses that the Mission has a key role to play in promoting the consolidation of peace and the observance of human rights and in verifying the implementation of pending commitments.

By this draft resolution, therefore, the General Assembly would authorize the renewal of the mandate of the Mission from 1 January to 31 December 2001, and would request the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, together with his recommendations regarding the continuation of the peace-building phase after 31 December 2001.

Guatemala is a success story for the United Nations. The parties testify unequivocally to its commitment to the peace process. There have been major advances, and challenges remain to be overcome as well. The sponsors hope that the international community and international organizations will continue to make a generous contribution in the form of financial and technical resources. We are convinced that today the Guatemala peace process is a good investment.

For those reasons, the sponsors trust that the General Assembly will renew its political support for Guatemala and will in due course unanimously adopt the draft resolution which I have just had the honour to introduce.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Other colleagues have spoken on draft resolution A/55/L.42, entitled "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development". We echo their appreciation for the international community's support for individual countries and for the region as a whole.

I turn now to the other draft resolution before the Assembly on agenda item 43, which is contained in document A/55/L.33/Rev.1 and which is entitled "United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala". Allow me, then, to begin by thanking the delegations of Colombia, Mexico, Norway, Spain, the United States of America and Venezuela for their continuous, ongoing support for the Guatemala peace process. Along with many other countries, they stood by us during the long and difficult negotiation of the agreements and, since 26 December 1996, during the implementation of the commitments set out in those agreements. Those countries have today joined in sponsoring the draft resolution: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guyana, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Peru, Portugal, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom.

Peace has been and will continue to be the responsibility of the Guatemalans themselves, but international cooperation has been of singular importance. The countries known as the friends of the peace process have been joined by many others, both developed and developing. That support has been given form through the United Nations, which, as a signatory of the agreements, is an integral part of the process, as well as through the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), which is an ex officio non-voting member of the Commission to Follow Up the Implementation of the Peace Agreements. In sum, the United Nations has been indispensable in providing greater certainty in the fulfilment of the peace agreements and in strengthening confidence in the consolidation of peace. At the same time, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other specialized agencies have provided decisive support in the implementation of many commitments laid down in the agreements.

Assessment of the accomplishments and the shortfalls in the implementation of the agreements recalls the proverbial partly filled glass. Much has been achieved, which would let us concentrate on the work that has been completed: the part of the glass that is full. But it must also be recognized that matters remain pending; these are the empty part of the glass. There are more than enough reasons for the delay in fulfilling the commitments undertaken at the outset. In some cases, when the agreements were signed there were over-optimistic expectations about the capacity to

undertake so many commitments simultaneously. Other cases arose out of the dynamic of the process itself, in which the completion of one phase generated further subsidiary commitments. And there was no lack of resistance on the part of pressure groups that felt they had been adversely affected by certain decisions. In other cases, public or private institutions simply failed to demonstrate the capacity or the will to carry out everything that had been agreed to.

But even though all parties have reaffirmed their commitment to the agreements, the fact remains that many tasks have not yet been completed. These have been provided for and rescheduled by the signatories to the process, in full consultation with civil society. Fulfilment of pending commitments that had been scheduled for the period 1997 to 2000 is now planned for the period 2001 to 2003. Since the United Nations is such an integral part of the process, we feel that the presence of the Organization during this period is indispensable.

Furthermore, now that we are engaged in a debate on the implementation of the recommendations of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, from the standpoint of the United Nations there is at least one lesson we can learn from that Panel, headed by Lakhdar Brahimi, that is relevant to the matter under consideration. I am referring to the need to recognize that, in post-conflict situations, United Nations missions should be neither prolonged indefinitely nor withdrawn prematurely. I believe that that applies to the situation in Guatemala, where the United Nations is clearly playing a significant role in the fulfilment of the peace agreements, but one that is secondary to that of domestic actors. Its presence now strengthens the capacities of those domestic actors.

The programme considered by the Secretary-General in his report (A/55/389), which foresees a gradual but progressive scaling back of MINUGUA over the next three years as it transfers some of its functions to national bodies and others to the programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, constitutes a balanced approach, given the ongoing dilemma regarding the duration of United Nations peace operations in countries that are dealing with post-conflict situations.

In short, the extension of MINUGUA's mandate is highly advisable from every point of view. For Guatemala, it is an additional step towards the fulfilment of what President Alfonso Portillo identified as a State commitment when he took office in January this year. For the United Nations, it offers the possibility of a gradual and timely withdrawal of an operation that has unequivocally proved successful. For this reason, I trust that all States members of this Assembly will, without exception, support the draft resolution before us.

In conclusion, and in anticipation of a discussion that will no doubt take place within the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee, I note that the Secretary-General's report anticipates severe cuts in the current budget of MINUGUA starting in 2001. We agree that there should be a gradual and progressive reduction of MINUGUA's staff, and we also feel that it would be possible to obtain a higher yield from all existing resources by replacing part of the international staff with local staff. But we would like to alert Member States to the risk of introducing excessively drastic cuts that could compromise the mission's ability to carry out its tasks fully, particularly in the area of human rights verification, which requires the Mission to be present in various localities. Specifically, the temptation to close down a growing number of regional offices as an austerity measure could adversely affect the presence of the Organization in the field, where the need is greatest.

There is another lesson to be drawn from the Brahimi report: let us not compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of United Nations missions merely on the basis of budgetary considerations. In other words, when we decide to send a mission to a country, let us give it the resources it needs to accomplish its objectives. If the Government and civil society of Guatemala pledge to persevere in fulfilling the commitments undertaken in the Peace Agreements, it would not seem too much to ask that the United Nations presence be of the size necessary to ensure proper support for that commitment.

Once again, I should like to express my thanks in advance for the understanding and support of the General Assembly.

Ms. Salgado de Gómez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for the report contained in document A/55/465, and other reports, which together provide a comprehensive report on the situation in Central America.

In paragraph 11 of resolution 54/118 of 15 December 1999, the General Assembly referred to the "new stage of consolidating peace and democracy in Central America" and requested the Secretary-General to lend the greatest possible support to the initiatives and activities of the Central American countries in the implementation of a new, comprehensive sustainable development programme and the establishment of the Central American Union.

In his report, the Secretary-General confirms that the United Nations system and its programmes and bodies are continuing to provide technical assistance and resources within the framework of national and regional programmes, but that there are complex problems such as disparities between the rich and poor, urban and rural areas and indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, which have stood in the way of the desired progress in the consolidation of peace and democracy.

The report refers with considerable optimism to the electoral processes in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, and to the establishment in El Salvador and Guatemala of the National Civil Police. We welcome these achievements, which we consider to be positive signs of the strengthening of democracy in the region.

The process of reconstruction in the region, which was devastated in 1998 by Hurricane Mitch, has made progress, although many obstacles remain to be surmounted. Thanks to the support of the international community and the human capacity of the people of Central America, progress has been made in overcoming the tragedy and resolute measures have been taken to prevent natural disasters in the future.

For Colombia, which has been involved in this process since its inception and has both encouraged and recognized the efforts and achievements that have been made, the human development information on the region provided by the United Nations Development Programme and other agencies is a cause for concern. We are convinced that peace and democracy will not solidify unless broad and sustainable support is provided and true development obtained.

As paragraph 17 of the report (A/55/465) states,

> "peace in Central America means not the end to conflict, but ensuring that human development translates into a decent standard of living, access to food, health care, education, work and housing."

Now is the time to renew our commitment and to continue to invest in peace, for which all are responsible. The draft resolution under consideration forms part of that commitment. We hope that it will be adopted by the General Assembly in its entirety.

Colombia, which is a member of the Group of Friends of the Guatemalan Peace Process, cannot fail to commend the considerable progress made in fulfilling the agreements since 1996, when the peace accords were signed, and the important commitment made by the new Government of President Portillo in that respect. The role of the Organization, through the work of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), has been fundamental, and has been a success not only for Guatemala but for the United Nations itself.

It is, however, inevitable, that in such an ambitious process there will be various obstacles and unforeseen developments. We should not be surprised by that. We must clearly understand how important it is for the international community to maintain its support at both the multilateral and bilateral levels. As has been repeated on many occasions, this has been crucial in the achievement of the peace that is currently being enjoyed in Guatemala.

In keeping with this process, Colombia offers its support, and appeals for the support of the General Assembly, for the draft resolution, so as to ensure that MINUGUA's work in Guatemala can continue.

Mr. Doutriaux (France)*(spoke in French)*: It is my honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union with reference to the draft resolution entitled "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development". The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey align themselves with this statement.

First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the high quality of the reports that have been submitted on this item: the report on human rights in Guatemala, the two reports that take stock of the

activities of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) and the report on advances in peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and development in Central America. These reports confirm the distance travelled since this matter first came up on the General Assembly's agenda back in 1983. Although there are still serious problems and major social inequalities, most of the region is now in a position to consolidate the progress that has been made towards the peaceful settlement of various conflicts, the free exercise of democratic rights and the strengthening of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Before dealing with the various countries in turn, I would like to stress the high priority that the European Union accords to economic and social development in the countries of Central America. The San José dialogue, established in 1984, is the framework for exchanges between the European Union and Central America. The last ministerial conference was held in Villamoura in February 2000 and demonstrated the joint determination of all the countries of the European Union and of Central America to strengthen and intensify their cooperation.

The Summit of Heads of State and Government in Rio de Janeiro in June 1999 also gave fresh impetus to this process with a three-way dialogue between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. This laid the groundwork for a strategic partnership with three major strands, one political, one economic and one cultural, educational, scientific and technical. Within the framework of this strategic partnership, the European Union and the Latin American and Caribbean countries adopted a joint anti-drug action plan in Panama last April.

The European Union is actively supporting all the countries in the region that have embarked upon structural reforms to bring about economic development and social peace. The Union has adopted a regional plan of action for the reconstruction of Central America, which, together with bilateral donations, is worth a billion euros to help countries affected by Hurricane Mitch.

The European Union intends to continue its support for the process begun in Stockholm, particularly at the next regional Consultative Group meeting in Madrid in 2001. In particular, the meeting in Madrid should offer an opportunity to present Central America as an area of economic development with the potential for investment. The countries of Central America and the donor countries will examine at this meeting various regional projects designed to put in place major infrastructures that will prepare the way for economic development and regional integration. In the European Union's view, the recovery programme should help boost democracy, transparency and environmental protection and alleviate poverty. National and bilateral measures taken in the Paris Club should also help support the recovery process.

Finally, like the Secretary-General, the European Union continues to attach importance to regional integration. This is a prerequisite for peace and development in Central America and, no doubt, one of the best possible ways of dealing with the diplomatic friction and border incidents that have affected the various countries of the region over the last two years.

The European Union would like to reaffirm its full support for the various initiatives that have been taken to put an end to various border disputes — notably, under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS). In our view, stable borders are crucial for peace and security in the region and essential for the achievement of the objectives of peace, reconciliation, democracy, development and justice enshrined in the Esquipulas II Agreement of 1987. The European Union particularly welcomes the agreement to adopt confidence-building measures signed by the representatives of Guatemala and Belize in the OAS Permanent Council on 7 November 2000. It is also pleased to note the constructive approach taken by Nicaragua, which has decided to submit its maritime demarcation dispute with Honduras to the International Court of Justice. The European Union calls upon Nicaragua and Costa Rica to continue the process begun by their two Presidents in Mexico in June 2000. The European Union wishes to reaffirm its commitment to conflict prevention measures in the region and supports the creation of regional mechanisms for resolving any disputes that may arise between countries in the area.

The European Union is pleased that general elections were carried out late last year, in which the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) participated as a political party. It welcomes the peaceful transfer of power, which signals significant progress towards democracy and the creation of an inclusive political system. The European

Union unreservedly supports the Secretary-General's reasonable and balanced proposal for extending MINUGUA's mandate until the year 2003. This measure is necessary in order to enable Guatemala to consolidate the achievements of the peace agenda and, in particular, to implement the essential components of the agenda that are still outstanding. The European Union particularly calls on all parties to implement without delay the provisions on the Fiscal Pact, for a future of peace and development, land reform, official status for indigenous languages, the dismantling of the Presidential Military Staff and reform of the Secretariat for Strategic Analysis. The European Union also calls on the parties to finalize the new timetable for implementing these measures as soon as possible. As we see it, an extension of the MINUGUA mandate should, above all, enable the parties to put their own commitments into practice. The international community can be no substitute for national efforts to achieve peace, which are more indispensable than ever.

The European Union will remain particularly attentive to the measures taken to combat human rights violations and to effectively combat impunity. The Union calls on the Guatemalan authorities to act on the Mission's recommendations on human rights. It would also urge the Government to set up the Commission for Peace and Harmony, as recommended by the Commission for Historical Clarification and the Secretary-General.

The European Union is heartened by the continuing consolidation of peace in El Salvador. Although there are still certain difficulties regarding public security and agrarian reform, progress has been achieved. The European Union fully endorses the Secretary-General's calls for the Ombudsman's Office, which constitutes a central institutional guarantee of respect for human rights, given its influence and increased resources, and for the parties to redouble their efforts to honour their commitment to respect both the letter and the spirit of the 1992 agreements.

Against this background, the European Union obviously welcomes the fact that this year's parliamentary and municipal elections in El Salvador and the municipal elections in Nicaragua were carried out freely and fairly. The peaceful manner in which these elections were conducted is an encouraging sign that past resentments have given way to genuine political maturity. Nevertheless, the European Union would join the Secretary-General in deploring the low participation rates, which were, unfortunately, accentuated in Nicaragua by an electoral reform that has had the effect of eliminating a large number of parties from the electoral process and encouraging abstention, which reached 80 per cent in some provinces. In our view, full participation in the electoral process, especially by the indigenous population and by women, should be more actively encouraged.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming unequivocally that the peoples and the Governments of the European Union are firmly committed to continuing to work alongside the peoples and the Governments of Central America to consolidate peace and democracy in the region.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is grateful to the Secretary-General for providing us with the extensive report on the situation in Central America, as well as the excellent report on the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA).

It is a shared belief of the international community that democratic governance in the countries of Central America is essential in order to achieve regional peace and stability. Japan therefore welcomes the considerable progress that has been achieved in consolidating peace and in the democratic transformation of societies throughout Central America. Just this past year, democratic elections were held in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. I wish in particular to mention the election that took place in Guatemala one year ago this month. It was the first general election in that country since the peace agreements were signed in 1996, and it was conducted in a free and fair manner and without major incident. Japanese observers joined representatives of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the European Union and non-governmental organizations in overseeing the election.

Japan has long held that the root causes of conflict, such as various economic and social problems, must be addressed in order to achieve lasting peace and stability. In this context, I would like to touch upon the situation in Guatemala. Under the guidance and supervision of MINUGUA, the first stage of the peace agreements was quickly implemented, with the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants into society. The Fiscal Pact, adopted in

May of this year, will enable the Government to increase spending on programmes related to the peace agenda. It is worthy noting that this Fiscal Pact was reached among parties from various sectors of society and can thus be seen as a demonstration of the will of the Government of Guatemala to consolidate the peace process.

Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

However, there continue to be serious problems that must be urgently addressed. I refer in particular to the need to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, to reform the military, the National Civil Police and the judicial system, and to strengthen the rule of law.

Since it was established in 1997, MINUGUA has been playing an essential role in consolidating peace in Guatemala, but the needs are ongoing. Japan therefore supports the extension of MINUGUA's mandate until 2003, with a gradual decrease in capacity, as described in the report of the Secretary-General.

I should add that Japan, for its part, has contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Guatemala and to the stability of the region by increasing bilateral aid and through assistance for projects in the areas of public health, education and the development of basic infrastructure.

Many countries in Central America are still struggling to overcome the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Japan was just one of the many countries that showed their concern by sending emergency aid to Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. Here again the needs are ongoing. We hope the international community will remain firm in its commitment to support the recovery efforts of these countries; in so doing it will help to strengthen the foundations of democracy and regional stability.

In conclusion, Japan welcomes the growing emphasis that the United Nations is placing on the root causes of conflict and on the need to engage in peace-building activities in order to reinforce democracy and enhance regional stability. The peoples of Central America are likewise to be commended for their efforts to address social and economic problems and establish democratic institutions.

Japan, for its part, continues to maintain close ties with the Central American region. With the Central American countries, Japan has had the pleasure of holding meetings of the Japan-Central American Forum four times in the past, and preparations are under way for the fifth meeting in the near future. That Forum — in which high-level Government officials and business leaders from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Japan participate — provides a most useful opportunity for cooperation and consultation on a wide range of issues of common concern. This is another demonstration of Japan's firm commitment to the region.

Finally, as a sponsor of the two draft resolutions before the Assembly, my delegation hopes they will be adopted by consensus.

Ms. Chassoul (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Today peace reigns in Central America. Today all the nations of the isthmus are deeply committed to freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and the environment. Today, despite difficulties and natural disasters, the region is taking firm strides to achieve greater economic and social development.

This situation contrasts with the regrettable situation of the 1980s, when war, destruction, poverty, social injustice and hunger reigned in our Central American sister republics. The situation in Central America at that time was not very different from what, unfortunately, it is today in other parts of the world. The international community seemed to have lost faith in the possibility of a peaceful, democratic and immediate solution to the evils besetting our region.

Fortunately, the region was able to move ahead. The progress made has been a direct result of a change in the attitude of the leaders and peoples of the region. We Central Americans have consciously and deliberately renounced violence while at the same time adopting dialogue, democracy and consensus as the fundamental pillars of all human and international relations. It could well be said that the peoples of Central America rejected the culture of war and embraced the culture of peace.

In 1987, the leaders of Central America resolutely decided to assume responsibility for the negotiating process they themselves had designed. Although it had not been party to the armed conflicts that afflicted our region, Costa Rica played an active and leading role in the Central American peace process. The agreement produced led to a successful end of the armed conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, and made it possible to strengthen democracy, respect for human

rights and reconciliation among our peoples. Central America enjoyed the active support and solidarity of the international community in that effort, especially that of the United Nations.

The Central American peace process tackled head-on the social, structural and economic causes of domestic conflicts. The peace agreements incorporated political, economic and social commitments as central elements designed to transform and modernize each of the nations of the region. Despite difficulties, all of the republics of Central America have taken significant steps towards building broad, pluralistic and multi-ethnic societies that respect human rights in order to achieve national reconciliation, economic and social development, justice and equity for all. The Central American experience therefore provides a valuable model of the mechanisms necessary to build peace after armed conflicts have come to an end.

Costa Rica is particularly pleased with the progress made by the other Central American republics in the area of respect for human rights and democracy. It cannot be said today that there are mass violations of human rights in Central America or violations of the democratic will of the people. Nevertheless, building lasting and stable peace in Central America requires ongoing efforts. True peace will not be guaranteed in the region until we all achieve greater economic and social development. Making progress with regard to democracy and human rights necessitates a constant effort to maintain, broaden and consolidate such development.

We must close the gap between the richest and poorest that today afflicts our peoples. We must ensure that the weakest and poorest among us can fully meet their basic needs. It is also essential to reduce the vulnerability of our countries to natural disasters and to take effective steps for rebuilding and normalization after they occur. We must also make greater efforts to ensure the safety of our peoples and to avoid the internationalization of criminal activity.

Efforts to ensure lasting peace in Central America cannot be considered concluded. Except for my own country, most of the nations of our region unfortunately have low human development indicators. The situation will continue to be fragile until every Central American country enjoys satisfactory sustainable human development, which is not currently the case. My country is therefore grateful to the international community, the United Nations and the United Nations Development Programme in particular for their continued cooperation in our region.

Mr. Cordeiro (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): Brazil is following with interest the ongoing consolidation of peace and stability in Central America. A society secure in its destiny is being established through the strengthening of democratic institutions and the modernization of economic structures. The elected Governments of the region have been fully consolidated in a free and pluralistic manner. The recent presidential declaration proclaiming the region as a zone of peace, freedom, democracy and development underscores the commitment of the Central American countries to modernization. These advances deserve the support and encouragement of the entire international community.

We also congratulate the countries of the isthmus on their determination to overcome the remaining obstacles, in particular those in the economic and social spheres. The vulnerabilities in those areas require that Central American countries redouble their efforts, as improving the living conditions of the population is a prerequisite for establishing solid foundations for lasting peace and development. In this context, we welcome in particular the progress made in the implementation of the peace agreements in Guatemala and the determination of the Government and the people of El Salvador to put into practice the commitments made in the area of institutional democratization.

The efforts of El Salvador, Honduras, Belize and Guatemala to find definitive and lasting solutions to their differences over borders is eloquent testimony to their spirit of cooperation and reconciliation. Likewise, the Alliance for Sustainable Development of Central America shows a spirit of cooperation and solidarity which is necessary to overcome common challenges, especially the natural disasters that have buffeted the region in recent years.

It is essential that the international community continue to support national and regional efforts to overcome the underlying causes of armed conflict. The international community should continue its cooperation and good offices, through the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS). Likewise, it should continue to support verification of the fulfilment of the various stages of

the peace process in Guatemala through the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA). Along with other international agencies, the United Nations Development Programme should continue its work to reduce the environmental and social vulnerability of the region and to consolidate democracy and governance.

Brazil was present during the crucial moments of the effort to bring peace and prosperity to Central America. It took part in the Support Group of the Contadora mechanism and cooperates with MINUGUA through the participation of police elements and liaison officers. Brazil also takes part in the joint inter-American defence mission and OAS activities for removing anti-personnel mines from many countries of the region. In recent years, Brazil has done everything in its power to work with humanitarian assistance programmes operating in the countries of the region affected by natural disasters. Following the recent disasters, Brazil sent a mission to Honduras and Nicaragua to evaluate the damage done to infrastructure.

Brazil nevertheless believes that, beyond emergency humanitarian assistance, more coordinated international efforts are needed. In that regard, we support the initiatives made at the United Nations to increase the effectiveness of measures to combat natural disasters by emphasizing preventive action and creating coordination and financing mechanisms to facilitate the transition from emergency assistance to fostering development.

Beyond humanitarian assistance, Brazil has in recent years cancelled the official debts of Nicaragua and El Salvador as part of the international community's actions of solidarity as a response to natural disasters.

Likewise, we applaud the attempts made to advance the Central American Integration System. Here we refer to the meeting of the President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, with the Presidents of Central America during his recent visit to Costa Rica. On that occasion, various types of joint action were considered with a view to ensuring more effective and competitive participation in the global economy for our entire region.

The progress towards peace that has been achieved in Central America gives us reason for optimism and confidence in the entire region, and it gives fresh hope to the whole of Latin America in its search for prosperity and its affirmation of the ideal of integration.

Mr. Ariás (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation aligns itself fully with the statement made earlier in this debate by the representative of France, speaking on behalf of the European Union.

I should like, however, to make a few additional comments, given the part played by Spain in recent years as a member of the Group of Friends of the Secretary- General for the Central American countries.

Spain — which, of course, continues to support the full implementation of the Guatemala Peace Agreements — welcomes the commitment made to that end by President Portillo during his inauguration last January, and we trust that the Government, political parties and various sectors of civil society will also continue to be committed to their implementation.

Although much progress has been made in the last four years, there is still much to be done. Spain hopes that the new time- table for implementation of the pending commitments will be approved as soon as possible, and that progress on the application of the Fiscal Pact will continue, with a view to making it a reality.

Spain prides itself on the fact that it will be hosting next January the regional meeting of the Consultative Group for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America. That meeting will represent an opportunity to consider the implementation of major infrastructure projects to promote the economic development and integration of Central America.

The Security Council recently held a debate on the item "No exit without a strategy". Although significantly different, the efforts by the United Nations in El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively, are two good examples of successful United Nations action and of the proper management of the elements of peacekeeping and peace- building.

The two processes provide interesting lessons about how the international community can help and encourage domestic forces in their efforts to recover from conflict. United Nations actions in El Salvador have provided a perfect example of how to make the transition from a peace operation to a peace- building

operation while gradually reducing the United Nations presence in the political and peace- related areas.

The United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) has, of course, played an important part in the progress made to date in Guatemala. Proof of this is that the Government, the former guerrillas and civil society — aware that there is still much to be done in implementing the Peace Agreements — have joined forces to request the General Assembly to extend MINUGUA's mandate for three more years. The Assembly will be taking a decision on this request in the next few days, which has already been incorporated into the Secretary- General's proposal for an initial one- year extension.

What is really interesting is that the Secretary-General's report already contains an exit strategy for the Mission. Over the next three years, it would be gradually reduced, handing over its functions to other agencies and programmes. In this way, by the year 2004 it could simply come to an end, having not only fully discharged its functions but also organized its own succession in an efficient and harmonious way.

Spain is proud of having participated in MINUGUA since its inception and urges Member States to give favourable consideration to this proposal for an extension.

Mr. Méndez (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Secretary- General for his timely submission of the reports that are serving as guidelines for us in our consideration of the item on the progress made by Central American countries in the areas of peace, development, freedom and democracy.

The consideration of this item reaffirms the importance our Organization attaches to international cooperation as a viable way of helping Central American countries consolidate peace, justice and democracy in the region.

Along with the part played by the United Nations in the follow-up, support and monitoring of the various objectives set out in the relevant agreements, we would like to highlight the commitment and willingness of the peoples and Governments of those countries to continue their efforts to ensure the full implementation of those instruments, with a view to fashioning a region of peace, freedom and sustainable economic development.

Against this backdrop, we agree with the Secretary- General's view, as stated in his report, that, despite existing difficulties and problems, the Central American countries are now in a better position to consolidate the progress made towards resolving conflicts through peaceful means, respect for human rights, the strengthening of democracy and the reaffirmation of the rule of law.

In this context, Venezuela believes that it is primarily up to those countries to continue, with the support of the international community and relevant bodies, to promote the elimination of the structural causes of the conflicts that so seriously affected the region in the 1980s, which were related in particular to economic and social problems and were intensified by the absence of democracy and of a climate of freedom and respect for human rights.

In this respect, we greatly appreciate the contribution made by bodies such as the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), which facilitated and strengthened the efforts made by the countries of the region, as in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala. As a member of the Group of Friends, we support the request for extension of the mandate of MINUGUA, as requested by the Government of President Alfonso Portillo.

In a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, Venezuela has been supporting, to the extent of its ability, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of countries in the region as well as their economic development. Accordingly, we have participated in demining activities in various countries and in the Consultative Group for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America, which has been meeting regularly since 1998, with a view to helping reduce the social and environmental vulnerability of the region, which was made clear by the devastation wrought by hurricane Mitch.

Likewise, last October we signed an agreement on cooperation in the area of energy with the Central American and Caribbean countries. Under that agreement, Venezuela will provide those countries, on favourable financial terms, 80,000 barrels of oil daily, in addition to the 160,000 barrels daily that, together with Mexico, we have been providing to some of those countries over the last two decades under the so- called

San José Agreement system, with a view to helping meet their economic needs.

In a more general context, Venezuela has also participated in its capacity as associate in the dialogue on political and economic cooperation begun several years ago between the European Union and Central American countries, known as the San José process, whereby we maintain more direct contact with the realities and interests of the region and with the efforts of the international community to strengthen democracy and to promote the economic and social development of our countries, to which the consolidation of the Central American Integration System is also a significant contribution.

Lastly, Venezuela reiterates its firm commitment to continuing to contribute to the efforts made primarily by the countries of the region, with the support of the international community through various cooperative mechanisms, in support of peace, democracy and development. In this spirit, our delegation is a co-sponsor of draft resolutions A/55/L.33/Rev.1 on MINUGUA and A/55/L.42 on the situation in Central America.

Mr. Meléndez-Barahona (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, through you, Sir, to extend my thanks to the Secretary-General for his report on the situation in Central America, contained in document A/55/465, which gives us important elements that contribute to the current debate.

When the General Assembly first considered the agenda item entitled "The situation in Central America: threats to international peace and security and peace initiatives" in 1983, relations between Central American countries were characterized by political and military tensions that exacerbated the regional crisis, while national conflicts seemed likely to transcend their respective borders and to generate a generalized, broader conflict, with all its negative repercussions for the people of Central America. This crisis situation was reflected every year in the reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, which depicted a landscape of uncertainty in the region as a result of antagonistic and irreconcilable positions in the context of the cold war.

Thirteen years after the signing of the "Procedure for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace in Central America", we are happy to note from the Secretary-General's most recent report that a significant change has been effected in the social, political, economic, institutional and security situation of the region through a process that has allowed us to consolidate the bases of genuine democracy; to ensure respect for and the promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms; to establish legitimate and freely elected Governments; to strengthen civil society; and to decide to make Central America a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development, where the experience of war and its scourges will never again be repeated.

Although it is true that we have taken great steps in the transition from war to peace and democratization, we share the Secretary-General's appreciation, as reflected in his report, that there remain many challenges — which, however, are not exclusive to our region — and that it is important to confront them with the same resolve with which we settled our armed conflicts, especially since these structural problems continue to affect the living conditions of a large part of the population of our region. Failure to address these problems will create a latent and genuine source of future tensions and conflicts.

Thus, the Governments of the countries of Central America, including that of El Salvador, have reaffirmed at various regional and international forums their commitment to striving to fulfil the aspirations and desires of the peoples of the region, particularly with regard to social development, so as to eradicate poverty and unemployment; to establish more just and equitable societies; to improve public safety; to strengthen judicial bodies; to consolidate a modern and transparent public administration; and to fight corruption, impunity, drug and weapons trafficking, terrorism and associated activities.

To that end, at the national level, I am happy to confirm that President Flores Pérez of El Salvador recently presented to the nation an ambitious and unprecedented tripartite integration programme. Its first component is geographic integration, including the construction of important land and maritime infrastructure that will allow the country to be better and more closely connected, internally and with Central America and the rest of the world. The second component is human integration, whereby we seek to create a participatory society in sync with the current century and to implement important environmental projects in order to give our population essential, non-

discriminatory access and training that will allow it to make productive use of new forms of communication, information and technology. The third component is economic integration, including a recent law on monetary integration setting the value of the colón at 875 to the dollar and allowing its free circulation. The law also permits free exchange with other currencies, including the euro, the yen and the pound sterling. With this measure, the people of El Salvador will be able to enjoy improved financial conditions, lower their rates of interest, eliminate the risks associated with exchange and increase the range and duration of financial instruments, to the benefit of the largest sector of the population. Salaries and pensions will be denominated in a strong currency chosen by the worker. Furthermore, the elimination of exchange risks will bring greater institutional stability to the country, making it more attractive to long-term foreign investment. We are sure that the Government of El Salvador will be given every international support to allow this comprehensive programme to serve as a catalyst to the Salvadoran economy, promote our country's economy and help us to meet the challenges ahead, to make further equitable social and economic progress and to achieve greater sustainable human development.

At the regional level, the Governments of Central America feel that we must proceed gradually and progressively with regional integration as the best way of coordinating and harmonizing regional efforts and of ensuring a viable and progressive future for our countries, particularly in order to be in a position to address more fully and effectively the challenges of globalization and vulnerability to natural disasters. We are therefore especially concerned by the statement in the Secretary-General's report that

> "Regional integration is crucial for consolidating peace and fostering development ... Although there has been some progress ... the overall integration process has begun to fragment over the last year [as a result of] longstanding border disputes, some of which have flared up recently". *(A/55/465, paras. 57-58)*

We are convinced that no country is unaware of the importance of coordinating and joining efforts to address common priority problems, as exemplified in the trend towards similar processes in various regions of the world. We therefore urge our brothers in Central America to take account of the Secretary-General's suggestion that

> "Greater political will is required by the Governments and civil societies of the region in order to adequately shape and advance the integration agenda through existing mechanisms and institutions" *(ibid., para. 57)*

and that we seek to settle differences by peaceful means in the context of international law so as to avoid obstacles hindering integration, free trade and regional development.

I would now refer specifically to El Salvador, in particular to the gradual implementation of the peace agreements. We are very pleased that the commitments undertaken by the Government of El Salvador in signing the peace agreements, including the San José Agreement on human rights in 1990, have been fulfilled in a gradual and progressive manner under United Nations monitoring, particularly through the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, which completed its mandate in April 1995 by recommendation of the Secretary-General, given that these commitments had been met almost in full.

For this reason, starting in May 1995, the verification of the fulfilment of outstanding commitments was assigned to increasingly smaller units: MINUSAL in 1995, the United Nations Office of Verification in 1996 and an office consisting of two international civil servants, supported by the office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in El Salvador, from July 1997. This was concluded in June 1998, when the follow-up of outstanding commitments was placed in the hands of the UNDP office in El Salvador, which, as I have said, was assigned increasingly fewer tasks, thanks to progress in the consolidation of peace and the implementation of agreements.

The Secretary-General reaffirms in his report that in 1999 the United Nations functions of verification and good offices were reduced in parallel with the gradual implementation of the peace agreements and that they became restricted to four socio-economic areas that are very sensitive and very complex, involving programmes relating to land transfer, the transfer of rural holdings to their current occupiers, the transfer of land exceeding the constitutional limit of 245 hectares and the protection fund for people injured or disabled in the armed conflict.

I am very happy to reaffirm to the Assembly the Government of El Salvador's strong desire to fulfil all its commitments under the peace agreements and, as expressed by the Secretary-General in his report, to close this chapter of our history.

I wish to share with the Assembly the Government of El Salvador's views on the degree of fulfilment of the agreements mentioned before. With regard to the first three matters, the Government has met its commitments as far as possible and is currently taking all possible measures to deal with the most detailed aspects mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, which, as he acknowledges, go beyond the Government's current capacities.

With regard to the fourth undertaking, my Government feels that it has complied with the letter of the peace agreements. We have decreed the creation of the protection fund for people injured or disabled in the armed conflict and have financed it. The implementation of this fund has met with some obstacles due mainly to the difficulty of identifying all the beneficiaries, the inclusion of new beneficiaries and the limited financial resources available for this purpose.

The Government of El Salvador recognizes the importance of finding a solution to this problem, even when it means going beyond the actual letter of the peace agreements. That is why representatives of our Government and the UNDP office in El Salvador have looked into the possibilities of facilitating the programme for the injured by evaluating the criteria for identifying those qualifying for benefits.

Thus, we are now able to state that El Salvador has met its commitments under the peace agreements. We keenly desire to close out this stage of our history, and to share with the international community any experience of ours that could be useful for the achievement of peace and reconciliation in other regions of the world.

We would also like to reiterate that there are goals in the history of a nation — in this case, El Salvador — that transcend time and space: for example, the continuity of the process of democratization, the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and economic and social progress. We are working to reach these goals day by day, to consolidate achievements, to prevent the causes of conflict from arising once again in our societies, and to ensure that the successes obtained will be maintained and strengthened so that we can continue to work towards the construction of a fairer and more equitable society.

Finally, may I cite the statement made by our Minister for Foreign Affairs during the general debate:

> "With regard to the situation in El Salvador, the process of implementing the peace agreements has been an exceptionally arduous and highly complex task that has been made possible by the firm political will of the Government; by the willingness of the Salvadoran people and all the country's political forces; and by national efforts that have enjoyed the valuable cooperation of the international community, in particular the group of friendly countries, which have always remained close to us, and the United Nations, whose verification work has contributed to the success of peace in El Salvador and to national reconciliation." (*A/55/PV.19, p. 15*)

We repeat our thanks, and, as the Secretary-General says in his report, my country and all Central America, deserve these efforts to be supported by the international community, both bilaterally and multilaterally. This help will be important for the consolidation of democracy in the region.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/55/L.33/Rev.1 and A/55/L.42 will be taken at a later date to allow time for the review of the programme budget implications of the two draft resolutions.

I call on the representative of Nicaragua, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to clarify the point made by some delegations that some Nicaraguan political parties were not able to participate in the recent municipal elections. This was due to the fact that they had not met the requirement of 75,000 signatures to

make them eligible. In the 1996 legislative and presidential elections, 25 political parties participated, of which 20 had not reached the minimum levels for electing even one deputy. Those 20 parties received more than $30 million from the State and the international community in order to help them participate in the process.

I do not think that it is advisable or economically wise in countries such as my own to create micro-parties. Nicaragua has a population of just over 2 million citizens, and they are the ones that participate in the electoral processes. There are five political parties that represent all political ideologies, and in the last elections the two main ones received about 75,000 votes.

Programme of work

The President in the Chair.

The President: I would like to inform members that at the request of the sponsors of draft resolution A/55/L.44/Rev.2, under agenda item 47, "Assistance in mine action", the General Assembly will postpone consideration of the draft resolution to a later time, to be announced.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.